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THE INSANE JEW.

AN OPEN LETTER TO DR. C. F. BEADLES, BY PROF. M.
BENEDIKT.

MY DEAR COLLEAGUE.—Your paper on “The Insane Jew” interested me greatly, for the consulting physicians of Vienna have many opportunities of observing the Jews, not only from Austria generally, but also from Russia, Roumania, and the other Balkan States, and specially because I have been occupied for a number of years in studying nervous diseases amongst these Jews.

It is a fact that the different forms of nervous degeneration (general paralysis, ataxia, etc.) and defective sexual power are extremely frequent among them, and that the graver forms of hysteria are met with in male and female Jews.

In my last work ⁽¹⁾ I gave the appropriate formula for etiological researches. The function of every organ or organism, healthy or morbid, is dependent on the following factors. In the first place there are the innate qualities and predispositions (“anlage”) of every organ or organism. In the second place there are the results of evolution, which depend on various circumstances and influences, and specially on the innate qualities.

Evolution has no power over these innate qualities, which are deeply rooted in the organism. In popular phraseology these qualities are called “second nature.” In their effects they rank nearly as high as congenital qualities.

Consequent on irritation, there is a special reaction in accord-

ance with the congenital and evolutionary condition of the organism.

If we construct a formula on these principles and denote with N the congenital predisposition, with N^1 the "second nature," with E the other factors of evolution, with O the occasional irritation, and with L the result of reaction: we get $L = f(\pm N \pm N^1 \pm E \pm O)$.

It is evident that this formula is valid for psychological functions.

In pathology the totality of the factors N, N^1 , and E was formerly called predisposition.

Has insanity amongst the Jews any reference to the individual being a Jew? And do the Jews of to-day represent a pure race?

Luschan's studies of skulls found in Asia Minor have proved that even in olden times the Jews were a mixed race. That is still more evident in the present day. We can distinguish at least three original races, *Semitic*, *Armenian*, and *Teutonic* (Amorites).

The last-mentioned intermixture is certainly rare, but can be recognised on living Jewish heads by the characteristic curve of the Teutonic occipital bone.

The first-mentioned, namely, the Semitic, seems to be principally represented by the so-called "Spaniols." These are the descendants of the Jews who migrated to Spain at the epoch of the first "dispersion," where they founded Toledo and other colonies. Exiled 2000 years later by Spanish fanaticism, they exist now principally in the Turkish and Balkan States, and in small numbers in other parts of Europe. This division of the Jewish race is, in my opinion, the Semitic part, because they have preserved more or less the type of the Semites as depicted on the old Egyptian monuments. They constituted an important factor in the progress of human culture in the middle ages, as they translated the Greek authors for the scholars of Europe. The ideas resulting were almost completely suppressed by the Church. They were transmitted from generation to generation principally by the medical profession, and without them the discoveries of Gallileo and Copernicus would have been deferred. This secret transmission did not escape the creator of the fable of Faust. The last Spaniol of modern importance was Spinoza. The Spaniols do

not represent a pure race, and since their isolation from the other branches of their nation they have become still more mixed with the dissimilar people who migrated with them.

It is a very interesting fact that, when the population of a country is dispersed, the different elements of its ancient lineage should separate by a kind of unconscious instinct.

We observe a similar phenomenon in times of great reforms and great revolutions. Parts of the same nation then separate themselves into different sections, each following their original lineage. The tribe of the priests, the Levites, have preserved their tribe traditions up to the present day. In the male line they have remained unmixed, although in the female line there has been intermixture. The Spaniol configuration is common to all the tribes, while the other tribes have also a configuration which is characteristic of them ; yet all are assuredly Semitic in descent.

This transformation in the course of centuries depends not only on sexual admixture, but also on other factors of evolution which set their seal on the external configuration as well as on the organism itself.

The second type, viz. the Armenian, is perhaps physically best represented by the Afghans, who are of Israelite descent. The Persians and Armenians, of to-day are parents of this section of the Jews. We cannot consider the Tartars, the Mountain Jews of the Caucasus, the Black Jews of Malabar, and the Hindoo Jews in this connection ; and we cannot speak of a "Jewish race," but rather of a "Jewish nation." The word nation is not indeed quite applicable, and I shall therefore use the expression "Jewish people."

I shall now describe the characteristic qualities of the Jewish people ; firstly, the mental and nervous qualities. No nation in ancient times was so fit to receive abstract ideas on Cosmogony and the fundamental questions of metaphysics as the Jewish people were, fifteen centuries before Christ. Moses must have recognised this quality in his followers, for he made the bold experiment of imparting to them knowledge of the highest importance from Hamitic and Semitic philosophers, which kept up the mysteries associated with the priesthood. The second psychical quality which was necessary in order that a people might bear this burden was, that high

ethical predisposition to sacrifice their political, social, and economic interest to profound ideas and convictions.

Doubtless the masses to whom Moses entrusted that mission of culture were mainly of Semitic offspring. The intermixture, which took place at a later date, became in time imbued with the ideas and sentiments, and acquired the characteristics of the Jewish conquerors of Palestine. Thus the "nature" of the Jewish Semites became by-and-by the "second nature" of the others, and through long years of the same political, religious, social, and economic life became their "first nature." The same result is noticed in those who migrated to Paris and Vienna, etc. They became in time true Parisians and Viennese.

These prevalent characteristic qualities stamp the Jewish people as neurotic. In ancient days, when agricultural pursuits were common, contact with nature and hard work acted as a corrective. In times of exile, dispersion, and persecution the Jews lost touch for a time with mountain, field, and forest. They lacked sport, they were not refreshed by art, which was partly forbidden to them by their religion and customs; their pleasures were much restricted by religious prescriptions, and they were excluded from public feasts of rejoicing. Other nations could find an outlet for their passions and emotions in outward action; the Jews found an outlet for them usually at the expense of health, and so became more and more neurotic.

Interest was centred in the family. Consequently family feelings became more marked and stronger in them than in other nations. This often resulted in excessive sexual intercourse, *intra matrimonium*. The females chiefly suffered by these excesses, and even at the present day, among orthodox Jews, every female is condemned from maturity till the menopause to an uninterrupted series of pregnancies, parturitions, and lactations. No wonder, then, that *hysteria gravis* is so frequent among Jewish women, and that neurologists all over the world are interested in the number, intensity, and variety of cases seen amongst the Jews.

Severe cases of hysterical aphonia, in endemic form, are very frequent in Jews, male and female. Hysterical aphonia is almost characteristic of Jewish descent, and the severer

forms of convulsions and psychopathies are extremely common amongst females as well as males.

Though the inherent qualities of the Jews have persisted for many centuries, nevertheless they are endowed with a great aptitude for variation, both mentally and physically. I have met with variations, from a psychological standpoint, only in the great Russian population. The son or daughter of an illiterate peasant or rural pope, when educated, passes at one step with astonishing rapidity from bigotry and superstition to extreme modern views. With all the consequences of this change the Jew is also—if the expression may be used—extremely plastic.

When he has received a modern education he becomes completely imbued with the ideas and sentiments of his *Milieu*. He enters into its customs, and even shows that he is not lacking in an aptitude and taste for sport, and for the fine arts, which remained latent in his ancestors. His capability for abstract ideas remains, and his inclination to display an excess of feeling is apparent from the fact that he associates himself with the extreme Chauvinists of the nation whose opinions he has accepted. The Jews, therefore, are not a nation in the true sense of the word. The first condition necessary for a nation is a common language. Hebrew is not absolutely dead, but is not a popular language.

Wherever education is ruled by the State the Jewish population is educated in the language of the surrounding nation. One could speak of a "community" if the separate sections of the Jews had an intimate relation one with the other, but this is not the case. There exists only a superficial connection founded on ancient traditions, and from time to time by the misery consequent on persecution. We have now developed in general the factors N and N¹, the first and second nature of the etiological formula, and also the factor E. We come, then, to the conclusion that the Jews are a very intellectual and neurotic nation, and that therefore there must exist a great neuro-pathological predisposition. We have still to examine the factor O, *i.e.* the causes which bring about neuro-pathological states, and especially insanity and general paralysis.

At the present time syphilis and alcoholism are cited as the commonest causes of general paralysis. I have always held

that this theory was incorrect, and am astonished to find how scientific fashion can hypnotise reason and judgment in contemporaneous literature. I shall divide my patients into two classes, the first consisting of the better class of workmen and the poorer artisans of Vienna; the second composed, to a large extent, of Polish, Russian, and other orthodox Jews. In the first class syphilis is not frequent, and drunkenness is uncommon. Among the orthodox Jews syphilis and drunkenness are still rarer. In both classes the degenerative neuroses and general paralysis are not rare. From these facts I am convinced, *a priori*, that the modern etiological theory is erroneous. In my paper quoted above I have proved that it is erroneous to state that syphilis is the chief cause of ataxia and general paralysis, and I have drawn attention to the fact that irritations, which seem to give rise to nervous degeneration, have in general only an effect when they act on predisposed individuals. This theory is put in a nutshell thus—*Tabicus et paralyticus non fit sed nascitur*. I have restricted the meaning of this sentence in the necessary manner. That the Jews are much subject to neuropathological affections has already been demonstrated. What are the exciting causes of general paralysis among Jews? For a long time I have had the impression that general paralysis is increasing among them. The first cause of this is the ill-treatment and cruelty to which the Jews have been subjected, principally in Russia and Roumania, during recent years; and therefore you observe that amongst the Russian Jews in London general paralysis is nearly endemic. You will naturally ask why general paralysis was uncommon and had not become hereditary in times when the Jews were persecuted and exiled more cruelly and frequently than at the present day? In those days the slaughter of the persecuted and the infinite misery of the exile, which germinated famine and disease, saved the unfortunate from madness. This prevention from madness is to-day less effective. But there are other reasons for the increase of insanity. The standard of living changed very rapidly amongst the Jews. In former times they were very modest in their pretensions to the enjoyment of life. Their influence was not strong enough for them to become favoured members of society. They had no social ambitions, they bore ill-treatment with patience, and consoled themselves

by saying "We are in exile"! As European nations became more democratic, more disposed to be tolerant in religious, social, and political matters, the Jews fell more or less into "Liberty's lap." They became artists, graduates, learned men, engineers, etc., but had and have still a harder struggle for existence than others. They quickly entered into the modern economic contest with all its fatal consequences as regards nervous integrity. The danger was greater for Jews, as they entered the new life with that tenacity which they had acquired in the epoch of misery, and with that temperament which is innate in them. In the females a curious ambition appeared. Formerly pampered neurotic individuals, they now began to aspire to a better social position; a great number became eccentric in their views and behaviour as regards family matters. Very many of them became, by reason of a superficial learning, actually perverse. All these exceptional circumstances resulted in an exceptionally high percentage of general paralysis in Jews of late years.

The official papers relating to insanity in Austria do not prove absolutely that there is an increase of insanity amongst the Jews. In Austria, and more especially among the Jews in Austria, there formerly existed a great antipathy to asylums. It is possible that this antipathy exhibited by the Jews was sooner conquered amongst them than amongst the rest of the population. Then the official figures, which indicated an increase, would be erroneous.

The statistics relating to the number and increase of the insane, outside asylums, are less instructive. Certainly many cases of insanity amongst the Jews are not reported to the authorities; this is indeed oftener the case amongst the Jews than amongst the rest of the population.

The Jews are well versed in the laws of heredity, and insanity is often concealed for worldly reasons, *e.g.* a profitable marriage.

Personal experience of medical men tells us, more plainly than official data, that the increase of insanity among the Jews is even greater and more alarming than appears from the official statistics.

¹ "*Tabesfragen vom Standpunkte des Erfahrung und der Biomechanik.*"



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